

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03  
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06  
AID-05 EB-08 CIEP-01 TRSE-00 STR-04 OMB-01 CEA-01  
COME-00 AGRE-00 IGA-02 INT-05 OES-06 IO-13 /102 W  
-----262006Z 054222 /41

R 261030Z JAN 77  
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1150  
INFO AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 0654

E. O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PFOR, AF, IR  
SUBJECT: AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS

1. SUMMARY: DE FACTO FOREIGN MINISTER WAHEED ABDULLAH BRIEFED ME JANUARY 23 ON THE LATEST FLAP IN AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS, ONCE AGAIN HAVING TO DO WITH THE OLD AND SEEMINGLY ENDLESS PROBLEM OF THE DIVISION OF THE WATERS OF THE HELMAND RIVER WHICH FLOWS INTO IRAN OUT OF SOTHWESTERN AFGHANISTAN. THE MOST RECENT DIFFICULTIES HAVE RAISED QUESTIONS ONCE AGAIN ABOUT FORMAL AND PUBLIC AFGHAN RATIFICATION OF THE HELMAND WATERS TREATY WHICH WAS CONCLUDED IN 1973. IT IS REGRETTABLE THAT THIS ISSUE STILL TROUBLES RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, WHICH HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF CULTURAL STRESS AND OF OTHER POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, ALTHOUGH OUR GUESS IS THAT NO FUNDAMENTAL DAMAGE HAS BEEN DONE TO THE SIGNIFICANT OVERALL IMPROVEMENT IN THESE RELATIONS OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS. THE DANGER IS THAT AFGHAN RELUCTANCE TO GIVE UP THEIR HELMAND CARD BY RATIFYING THE 1973 HELMAND TREATY WILL CAUSE THE IRANIANS TO SLOW DOWN THEIR AID, LEADING TO AN ESCALATION OF ACRIMONY AND  
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ESTRANGEMENT. THERE IS ROOM FOR OUR ENCOURAGING PATIENCE AND THE POURING OF OIL ON THESE TROUBLED WATERS IN BOTH CAPITALS. THE REST OF THIS MESSAGE GIVES THE DETAILS OF THE LATEST DISPUTE. END SUMMARY.

2. ABDULLAH SAID THAT FIFTEEN OR SO YEARS AGO THE IRANIANS BUILT A FLOOD CONTROL DAM ON THE SISTAN

RIVER AT A PLACE CALLED KOHAK (PHONETIC SPELLING). THIS DAM DIVERTED FLOOD WATERS INTO AFGHAN TERRITORY DAMAGING SOME 100,000 HECTARES AND CAUSING MANY AFGHAN FARMERS TO MOVE. IN ADDITION, THE IRANIANS BUILT CANALS AND INSTALLED PUMPS WHICH TOOK WATER AWAY FROM AFGHANISTAN PARTICULARLY ALONG THE COMMON BOUNDARY RIVER. AT THAT TIME AND SUBSEQUENTLY, THE AFGHANS SENT PROTEST NOTES BUT THESE NOTES BROUGHT NO RESULTS. ABDULLAH ASSERTS THAT THE AFGHANS DID NOT MAKE THESE PROTESTS PUBLIC IN ORDER TO AVOID HARMING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

3. ABDULLAH WENT ON TO SAY THAT RECENTLY THE GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN (GOA) HAD DECIDED TO BUILD A DAM NEAR WHERE THE HELMAND TURNS NORTH AT A PLACE CALLED KAMAL KHAN. THE PURPOSE OF THIS DAM, WHOSE CONSTRUCTION ABDULLAH SAID HAS BEGUN, IS FLOOD CONTROL. ON LEARNING OF THIS PROJECT, THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR IN KABUL WENT TO ABDULLAH AND STATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAN (GOI) FEARED THAT THE PROJECT WOULD DAMAGE THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE HELMAND RIVER VALLEY.

4. ABDULLAH SAID THAT AT THIS POINT, WHILE HE WAS CONSULTING WITH AFGHAN TECHNICIANS AND PREPARING A RESPONSE TO THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR, AN ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE TEHRAN NEWSPAPER "KAYHAN" ABOUT THE AFGHAN PROJECT AND UNDER A HEADLINE WHICH STATED "AFGHANS STEALING IRANIAN CONFIDENTIAL

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WATER". THE "KAYHAN" CIRCULATES REGULARLY AMONG THE AFGHAN ELITE AND THEREFORE THIS ARTICLE BECAME A MATTER OF PUBLIC DISCUSSION IN KABUL. ACCORDING TO ABDULLAH, A HEATED DISCUSSION WAS HELD IN THE CABINET WITH SOME MEMBERS WANTING THE AFGHAN PRESS TO ANSWER "KAYHAN". WHILE THE MATTER WAS UNDER DISCUSSION, A LETTER APPEARED IN ANOTHER "KAYHAN" ISSUE, PURPORTEDLY FROM CITIZENS OF IRANIAN SISTAN AND THE LOWER END OF THE HELMAND, AGAIN CRITICIZING THE KAMAL KHAN DAM PROJECT. ABDULLAH COMMENTED THAT THIS LETTER CONTAINED SUCH FULL DETAILS ON THE HELMAND WATERS QUESTION THAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN DRAFTED IN THE IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY.

5. AT THIS POINT, ABDULLAH CALLED IN THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR AND TOLD HIM THAT THIS ARTICLE IN "KAYHAN" CAME AT AN EXTREMELY AWKWARD TIME FOR THE GOA BECAUSE AN AFGHAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IS

BEING CONVENED IN KABUL ON JANUARY 30 AND THIS MATTER WOULD INEVITABLY COME UP FOR DISCUSSION IN A WAY WHICH MIGHT POISON THE ATMOSPHERE OF AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS. ABDULLAH SAID THAT HE TOLD THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR THAT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE HELMAND WATERS TREATY (SEE KABUL A-18 OF MARCH 22, 1973), ARTICLES II AND V, IRAN WOULD OBTAIN 26 CUBIC METERS PER SECOND OF WATER EVEN AFTER THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE KAMAL KHAN DAM. ABDULLAH SAID THAT HE POINTED OUT TO THE AMBASSADOR THAT UNDER THE TREATY IRAN HAS NO CLAIM TO ANY ADDITIONAL WATER AND THAT AFGHANISTAN HAS THE RIGHT TO USE THE REMAINING WATER AS IT WISHES.

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03  
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R 261030Z JAN 77  
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1151  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KABUL 0654

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 11)

6. LAST WEEK, THE AFGHAN AMBASSADOR TO IRAN CAME TO KABUL FOR CONSULTATIONS. ABDULLAH SAID THAT HE HAS NOW RETURNED TO TEHRAN AND HAS BEEN INSTRUCTED TO SEE PRIME MINISTER HOVEYDA AND TO MAKE CLEAR TO HOVEYDA THAT THE GOA DOES NOT WANT A POLEMIC, AND THAT IT BELIEVES THE TWO COUNTRIES NEED EACH OTHER IN FACING A COMMON DANGER FROM THE NORTH.

7. IN THE MEANTIME, ABDULLAH SAID THAT THE FORMALEXCHANGE OF RATIFICATIONDOCUMENTS ON THE HELMAND WATERS TREATY AND GIVING PUBLICITY

TO THIS FINAL ACT OF RATIFICATION IN AFGHANIS-  
TAN WOULD HAVE TO BE DELAYED UNTIL SOME TIME  
AFTER THE MEETING OF THE AFGHAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
WHICH BEGINS JANUARY 30 SO AS TO AVOID THE KIND  
OF DOMESTIC REPERCUSSIONS WHICH WOULD DAMAGE AFGHAN-  
IRAN RELATIONS. ABDULLAH SAID THAT PRESIDENT DAOUD  
HAD EARLIER POSTPONED THIS FORMAL AND PUBLIC  
ACT WHILE HE WAS GETTING HIS VERY SENSITIVE  
DIALOGUE WITH BHUTTO UNDER WAY. UNDER THE  
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BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES (EVEN WITHOUT THE OFFEND-  
ING "KAYHAN" ARTICLE, THAT IS) IT WOULD HAVE  
BEEN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT, ACCORDING TO ABDULLAH,  
FOR DAOUD TO HAVE HAD TO DEAL WITH HIS OWN PEOPLE  
ON BOTH THESE SENSITIVE ISSUES, INVOLVING NATIONAL  
PRIDE, AT THE SAME TIME.

8. FINALLY, ABDULLAH EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT WE  
COULD SUPPORT THE AFGHAN EFFORT IN TEHRAN TO CALM  
THESE TROUBLED WATERS. I SAID THAT I WAS SURE  
OUR CHARGE WOULD USE ANY APPROPRIATE OPPORTUNITY  
TO EXPRESS OUR HOPE TO THE GOI THAT THIS MATTER  
COULD BE RESOLVED TO THE MUTUAL SATISFACTION OF  
BOTH PARTIES.

9. IN A SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION (JANUARY 25)  
WITH IRANIAN AMBASSADOR DAVOUDI HE STRESSED THAT  
THE SHAH IS VERY ANGRY THAT THE AFGHANS HAVE NOT  
OPENLY RATIFIED THE HELMAND TREATY. DAVOUDI ALSO  
SAID THAT THE GOI HAS OFFERED TO HELP THE AFGHANS  
BUILD CANALS TO USE FLOOD WATERS FOR IRRIGATION  
BUT THAT THE AFGHANS HAVE NOT RESPONDED TO THIS  
OFFER. ACCORDING TO DAVOUDI, THE PUMPS, CANALS  
AND FLOOD CONTROL PROJECTS ON THE IRANIAN SIDE OF  
THE BORDER INVOLVE RIVER WATER THAT RIFS IN IRANIAN  
TERRITORY AND NOT THE HELMAND.

10. COMMENT: THE AFGHAN LEADERSHIP DOES NOT WANT THIS  
PROBLEM TO AFFECT ADVERSELY AFGHANISTAN'S RELATIONSHIP  
WITH IRAN, WHICH HAS BEEN STEADILY IMPROVING IN THE LAST  
COUPLE OF YEARS. PARTLY THIS IMPROVEMENT IS A  
RESULT OF LARGE IRANIAN AID OFFERS, BUT IT ALSO  
RESULTS FROM A DETERMINATION AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS  
(IN BOTH GOVERNMENTS, WE BELIEVE) THAT THE TWO  
COUNTRIES HAVE A MUTUAL INTEREST IN GOOD AND CLOSE  
RELATIONS. WHAT IS CAUSE FOR CONCERN IS THAT THE  
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GENERATIONS-OLD HELMAND DISPUTE MIGHT EXERT ITSELF AS ONE MORE OF SEVERAL EXACERBATIONS IN AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS, AND GROW BEYOND THE REAL IMPORTANCE EITHER SIDE GIVES IT. WHAT WE MAY BE SEEING HERE IS THE SMALL COUNTRY, AFGHANISTAN, HANGING ON TO VIRTUALLY THE ONLY LEVERAGE (THE HELMAND WATERS) IT HAS AGAINST ITS WEALTHY AND POWERFUL NEIGHBOR WHILE THE LATTER CAN DELAY OR THREATEN TO CANCEL ITS AID. THIS SITUATION COULD SPIRAL INTO AN ACRIMONIOUS AND UNFORTUNATE SITUATION, PARTICULARLY GIVEN THE MACHISMO PSYCHOLOGY OF BOTH CULTURES AND NATIONAL LEADERS.

11. WE REALIZE THAT ABDULLAH QUOTED US OUT-AND-OUT THE AFGHAN POINT OF VIEW, WITHOUT EFFORT TO TEMPER THIS VIEW BY APPLYING LESSONS OF HISTORY WHICH DEMONSTRATE MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND ENRCROACHMENTS BY BOTH SIDES. WE ARE NOT ALTOGETHER CERTAIN OF THE HISTORY WHICH HE DID QUOTE (E.G., THAT OF FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, AND AFGHAN RESTRAINT AT THAT TIME). WE STRONGLY BELIEVE NEVERTHELESS WE SHOULD USE EVERY OCCASION TO POUR OIL ON THESE TROUBLED WATERS, INCLUDING AT THOSE TIMES IRANIANS AIR THEIR COMPLAINTS -- JUSTIFIED, WE BELIEVE -- ABOUT AFGHANISTAN'S CONTINUING UNWILLINGNESS TO RATIFY THE 1973 HELMAND TREATY IN OPEN AND STRAIGHTFORWARD MANNER. FROM THE KABUL PERSPECTIVE, WE BELIEVE IT BEHOOVES THE SHAH TO BEND OVER BACKWARDS TO BE PATIENT WITH THE VAGARIES OF HIS SMALL AND IMPECUNIOUS NEIGHBOR. BENDING OVER BACKWARDS IS NOT ONE OF HIS MOST PROMINENT PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS, BUT IN THIS CASE IT IS IN HIS, AS WELL AS OUR INTEREST FOR HIM TO BE PATIENT AND TO WEIGH CAREFULLY THE REAL POTENTIAL ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF AN AFGHAN FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT BEFORE MAKING IT A POLITICAL ISSUE. MEANWHILE, AFTER THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, I  
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WILL HAVE A CHANCE TO TALK ABOUT THIS WITH NAIM AND TO TRY TO NUDGE THE AFGHANS INTO A MORE FORTHCOMING POSTURE. WE SHOULD OF COURSE STAY OUT OF THE DETAILS, BUT IN CONVERSATIONS WITH BOTH SIDES WE SHOULD URGE REALISM, RESTRAINT, PATIENCE AND COMPROMISE IN THEIR AND OUR COMMON INTEREST.  
ELIOT

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## Message Attributes

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